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ABSTRACT

This paper argues against the affirmative action legislation contained in Assembly Bill (AB) 1725, putting forth the position that affirmative action policies in faculty hiring and student admissions represent de facto racial and gender discrimination. The paper criticizes the purely formal language of AB 1725, arguing that it blurs the distinctions between disciplines and that it seeks to make comprehensive such divergent themes as critical thinking and writing across the curriculum. Suggesting that colleges are dominated by the doctrine of moral and political relativism, which assumes that what is right or true is relative to the individual, and which thus makes colleges incapable of imposing any traditional or orthodox values on others, the paper argues that this professed indifference in fact masks a covert zeal for the spread of repressive egalitarianism. The conclusion calls for an end to affirmative action regulations and the establishment of color-blind policies in educational hiring and admissions as a true reflection of societies commitment to equal rights. (PAA)

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How Pluralism is Giving Way to Special Privilege in the California Community Colleges

by

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"A harmful truth is better than a useful lie." -- Thomas Mann

Through the reforms required by AB1725, California's community college system is striving to be "born again" in the educational mission of its origins and promote social pluralism in the process. But while the new law addresses the issue of academic standards to some degree, the overriding objective of AB1725 is to capitalize on and nurture the growing racial and ethnic pluralism of this State. As a 1988 Board of Governors' analysis points out, the law's intent language takes its rise from demographic data, noting that "concerns about affirmative action and staff diversity are... woven into the very fabric of AB1725." (p.20)

It is surely right to commit ourselves to such a project, not only because pluralism is a fact of life but because it provides support for the truth of the great American proposition "that all men are created equal," the central idea of our nation's Declaration of Independence. But while pluralism has many enthusiastic admirers and defenders, it has very few who know and appreciate its foundation in human nature. There is an unfortunate tendency today to treat the various groups that are found in our society as if they were members of different species rather than variations on the common human theme. We are in danger of losing the advantages of a varied ethnic stew (as distinguished from a melting pot) at the very moment when we have achieved great results. One would think from the

anxious concern so often expressed about minorities and women that that achievement will be easily and quickly lost if we do not maintain a race-conscious attitude (perhaps permanently). It is not a sanguine complacency nor a thoughtless antipathy to the problem of racial and gender equity which moves us to reflect on how far we have come and how precarious indeed is our hold on justice. It behooves us to know with utmost clarity what our duty is today with regard to equality and pluralism. For if this State's most outspoken advocates of both are mistaken, as I think they are, we are in a sorry condition to say the least.

The diversity of California's community college students is truly a wondrous thing. Once largely white, male and middle class, the typical CCC student body today is multiracial and multiethnic, and especially female. One would think that this encouraging development would be something of which we as educators should be justly proud. Evidently community colleges in this State are opening the door to educational -- and therefore social and economic -- opportunity for our citizens. Yet something seems to be troubling us in this paradise. Rather than capitalizing on this diversity as the opportunity it surely is to demonstrate the capacity of our educational system and our philosophy to carry forward "the work thus far so nobly advanced," we propose to render it less likely of accomplishment by committing ourselves to a thorough-going system of <u>de facto</u> racial and gender discrimination. That is, just as we are on the verge of proving that equality of opportunity can bring together all races, colors and creeds in the undeniably <u>human</u> project of educating our hearts and minds in a free and democratic society, we are placing all of this at risk by making the secondary characteristics of race and gender the authoritative criteria for our educational efforts.

Now this is a serious charge. What do I offer as evidence to support it? Primarily, I offer the terms and conditions of AB1725, which makes a cursory bow in the direction of academic excellence but imposes with a vengeance every aspect of affirmative action possible in faculty hiring and promotion, and in the matriculation of students. I propose to show that the new law will only exacerbate or worsen our education problems rather than solve them. As a tool in the hands of the enemies of true education and true equality, AB1725 will further pervert the mission of community colleges.

I

The passage of AB1725 has been heralded as the beginning of a new era in the California Community Colleges. While making no more than a tacit admission that community colleges have suffered from an exceedingly poor reputation (not entirely, but very often, deserved), the leaders of our "postsecondary system" (the euphemism many prefer) would have us believe that we are on the verge of great things. But I suggest that the alleged rise in academic standards may actually be a cover for the perpetuation of the educational folly that got our colleges into their present mess. The most that can be said for the bill is that it declares that the goals of the community colleges are what our trusting fellow citizens have always believed them to be, viz., the provision of (a) the first two years of a college or university education, (b) technical and vocational training, (c) remedial instruction in support of transfer and occupational programs, and (d) community service programs that complement the curriculum. Our citizens are entitled to wonder why, after 20 years or so of numerous educational "reforms" designed to accomplish various extraneous political, economic and social goals, our educators should suddenly (and inexplicably)

recant their ideology and proclaim their devotion to what they should have been doing all along. But however many fine-sounding phrases appear in AB1725 to demonstrate our educators' "rebirth" in the true and original goals of community colleges, we must remember that beauty is only skin deep and certainly not always to be found in the eye of the observant and informed beholder.

What evidence do we have, in other words, that educational excellence is truly the goal of our educators? The purely formal language of the reform law will not take on substance unless we breathe academic life into it. We already have some returns, as it were. Consider the Title V regulations (complementing AB1725) concerning critical thinking and writing across the curriculum. Here surely we would expect to find evidence of academic streamlining. When these two laudable (and long overdue) goals are not treated as distinct rather than related, they are robbed of any meaning by ill-fated attempts to make them comprehensive. For example, from the Chancellor's Office come impressive guidelines on critical thinking which unfortunately reduce it to a process in the service of whatever goals instructors establish for their students. Proposing the vague goal of "intelligent action," consultants to the Chancellor tell us that critical thinking involves these (ambiguous) elements: "diverse cognitive processes and associated attitudes," utility with respect to "diverse situations and fields," and improvability "by instruction or conscious effort." And the good (but false) news is that one size fits all.

But by blurring the distinction between fields as distinct as academic and liberal education on the one hand, and vocational and recreational education on the other, the guidelines actually lower the goals of the former and falsify the goals of the latter, thereby doing an injustice

to both. Nowhere do these guidelines so much as mention anything so controversial as that TRUTH might be the goal of higher education, or that free, yet disciplined, inquiry, might be an appropriate means for attaining it. Thus liberal education is reduced to teaching the skills by which students may accomplish the action-oriented goals of their teachers, and our other educational functions are obliged to take on the patina of liberal education without the reality of it. Indeed, unless truth is the object of a liberal education, there is little likelihood that our courses and programs will be anything more than indoctrination in the fashionable orthodoxies of the day.

Consider also the pilot programs which have already been instituted in critical thinking. One district has successfully enlisted the efforts of a cross-section of instructors who have, in turn, re-examined and even revised, their teaching goals and methods. But even the best of those offerings (see the report of Cosumnes River College, Sacramento) fail to question the regnant academic relativism which is at the heart of our problems. (More about this below.)

In no area of the curriculum is there any serious criticism offered of either the goals or the methods of current academic endeavors. One would think that the problem is nothing more complicated or troublesome than a failure to think quite as hard or as often as we should. But perhaps there are grounds for wondering just how much critical thinking takes place among educators who propose, in the name of reform, merely to pursue goals which our citizens have never doubted were our goals, and to radicalize the policies which those same citizens mistakenly believe are being corrected by the reform.

I suggest that we are far too complacent about the curriculum. The

problem is not merely lack of rigor or difficulty, as important as that is; it is lack of a clear goal which alone can render intelligible, not to mention justify, such rigor and difficulty. Let me illustrate what I mean. Meetings of community college educators -- both instructors and administrators -- rarely concern themselves with issues of scholarly or academic inquiry. At their annual conferences instructors invariably present to each other their latest methodologies, resolutely ignoring questions as to whether what they are teaching is worth knowing or is a genuine contribution to knowledge. Similarly, administrators see their task as proclaiming and following the latest educational trend and setting campus wheels into motion to implement it -- until the next trend gives rise to another equally pointless round of endeavors. Raising fundamental questions of purpose and standards invariably makes many people exceedingly uncomfortable; after all, haven't practically all of us been taught by our teachers that no one can know anything about what is right or true or just for human beings? These are "matters of opinion" or, as so many like to say, "values," into which serious inquiry is practically forbidden as if there were a law against it.

In short, other than some vague belief that our students ought to be well educated, few educators today can offer a compelling educational (as distinguished from an economic, social or political) reason for us to demand that students be well grounded in the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences. I submit that the reason for this lies in the domination of our colleges by the doctrine of moral and political relativism.

Relativism is based on the proposition that what is good, right, true or just is relative to the person, group, society or epoch; and the corollary is that nothing can justify us in imposing our "values" on others. But while this allegedly neutral point of view is almost always given the

benefit of the doubt, it is merely another species of imposition. Every society has an orthodoxy; the only question is which it will be. Once our colleges upheld the American way of life and encouraged the serious study -- which America makes possible -- of the moral and intellectual tradition of the Western world. The only active and competing orthodoxy is that of the academic left, whose object, thinly veiled, is to subject us to a repressive egalitarian regime. Whenever pressed on this point, the proponents of this agenda retreat into their neutral stance. But, to borrow a phrase from Abraham Lincoln, this professed indifference masks a covert real zeal for the spread of repressive egalitarianism. No effort is spared to prevent the issue from being fairly joined. Anti-educational and undemocratic goals such as reverse racism and sexism are pushed under high-sounding names which obscure their real purpose.

Consider the recurring proposals for honors programs for our best-prepared students. If we look beyond the attractive packaging, we discover that the ubiquitous and invariable feature of these programs is the resurrection of the 1960s "alternative" or "new university" curriculum with its tiresome emphasis on the alleged racism, imperialism, provincialism, militarism and sexism (I may have left something out of this list) of both American democracy and Western civilization, and the warm, uncritical embrace of more "idealistic" approaches. But whenever and wherever attempted, such approaches have led to a worsening of human and social problems, rather than a resolution of them. That is, the greater a regime's commitment to radical egalitarianism, particularly in the socialist and third-world regimes, the greater the extent of poverty, inequality and injustice. On the other hand, the evidence is overwhelming that, despite their flaws, the United States and other Western (or Western-oriented) nations boast the

highest standard of living, the greatest equality and the most advanced justice in the world. The only plausible argument of the radical egalitarians is the alleged moral superiority of their regime. This reminds us of nothing so much as the medieval religious fanatics who insisted that the deprivations of a grossly unfair social system had to be endured for for the sake of the ultimate salvation in the next life.

In truth, the academic restructuring of community colleges by AB1725 provides no alternative to the sterile, though dominant, doctrines of moral and political relativism. Without such a challenge, we will see only a replay of the mistakes of the past. Unfortunately, we have an example already in the form of the racist and sexist mandates of the current reform law.

II

Although we have been led to believe that AB1725 aims at the academic resurgence of the community colleges, we must face the challenge to that claim posed by the new law's broad and deep commitment to affirmative action, the currently respectable name for racism and sexism. Hardly any aspect of our system escapes notice. Whether it is a determination to recruit 30 percent of our new faculty from protected groups by 1992 and to achieve the ultimate goal of a staff reflective of the State's racial and ethnic diversity by 2005; or the consideration of the impact of race and gender in granting tenure and in the formation of screening committees, there is no mistaking the new law's ardent pursuit of special privilege for members of some groups to the disadvantage of others. The law takes utterly for granted the current, largely voluntary, trend in the State toward greater racial and ethnic diversity, and provides no explanation for the real cause of that diversity which is the nation's commitment to the principle of human equality.

We are in grave danger of forgetting certain truths, so they bear

repeating. We live in a nation the fundamental principle of which is equal human rights, i.e., rights according to nature. Neither the society nor the government "gives" any person his or her rights. The Declaration of Independence teaches us that the purpose of government is to secure the rights with which our Creator has endowed us. That is the standard to which our government is bound and by which we rightfully judge its laws and policies. Now to the extent to which this nation has adhered to equal rights and government by consent of the governed, it has been (and has become) the home to a multitude of varied races and tongues. The crowning achievement in recent times was the passage of the comprehensive Civil Rights Act of 1964. That law made it public policy in this country that discrimination on the basis of such secondary human traits as race, color, national origin and gender was illegal, thereby promoting a color-blind society to match our color-blind Constitution. But while the majority of Americans -- black, brown, red and yellow, as well as white -- supported that laudable goal, a misguided minority immediately began to work away at the foundation of the law and make it serve purposes contradictory to its clear intent. Crucial to this questionable project was the patently false claim that the Civil Rights law did not seek to protect the rights of all Americans but only of those who had previously suffered the bulk of the discrimination. In so striking at the heart of equal justice under the law (and in effect denying equal rights by nature), these dissembling "advocates" of civil rights have actually supported reverse discrimination. Before the Civil Rights Act was even given a chance to function, it was held to be a nullity unless it brought forth immediately measurable and quantifiable results in the form of proportional gains for the previous victims of unfair discrimination. That is, the goals of the civil rights cause had not been met unless American

society was instantly transformed through a process of social engineering. Consequently, many in the community colleges in those days who shared these undemocratic goals called for the lowering of academic requirements, recruitment of unprepared students, revision of the curriculum toward minority and women's studies, the virtual abolition of letter grades, redistribution of financial aid to unqualified students, and, of course, affirmative action in hiring and tenure decisions. The object was to qualify the unqualified -- quickly and easily.

I think it is plain that this mania for transforming the community colleges in order to accommodate large numbers of unprepared students has pretty much played itself out. The current reform movement, in part at least, is a reaction to these unfavorable developments. Community colleges were once called high schools with ash trays; but in many places our programs were not even at the high school level. (But at least we are getting rid of smoking!) Our institutions were becoming places in which the unprepared were being taught by the uninspired to pursue the unattainable.

But the reform movement seems to have been hijacked along the way. Perhaps as the price for winning legislative approval (in a legislature controlled by liberal Democrats) for something like parity with the four-year colleges and universities in this State and greater faculty control over the curriculum, we have sold our educational souls to the affirmative action devil. Lest there be any doubt of this, note well that job announcements for community college instructors these days, while they make perfunctory references to qualifications, routinely call for candidates who are especially "sensitive" to the diverse needs of our students. In other words, we are not to treat all students equally, nor seek instructors with the highest qualifications possible; rather we should patronize those

unfortunate enough at this time to be black, brown, red or female. I say "unfortunate" because our students (and faculty) are being treated as if they were incapable by virtue of their race or gender of the rigorous program of study necessary for a genuinely liberal (or, for that matter, a technical/vocational) education. Rather than holding all students, regardless of background, to the same high level of expectations (such as Jaime Escalante has done at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles), we have decided in effect that minorities and women are just not capable of performing at those standards. This is a racist and sexist argument, pure and simple.

In the early 1970s my college reached and passed a crisis over racial sensitivity. The earliest Economic Opportunity Programs, you may remember, were based on the assumption that minority students were far more likely to be taught successfully by minority instructors (or by other minority students as tutors) than by someone of the then white majority. In such cases, minority students were cruelly deprived of the skills of a qualified instructor or classmate. We at Barstow College abandoned this deluded concept and recruited instructors and tutors, regardless of race, who were knowledgeable or already successful in the courses they taught or tutored.

Now this valuable lesson gained from experience is about to be forgotten as we pursue the goal of a teaching staff "representative" of the ethnic and gender composition of the State's population. Interestingly, as we have noted, AB1725 seems to require only that 30 percent of the new hires in the system <u>as a whole</u> must be minorities or women, rather than imposing such a goal on each and every district or campus. Even so, the difficulties of attracting the most qualified minorities and women to community colleges when more prestigious jobs await them in four-year

colleges or universities will not easily be overcome. The "diversity fund" established by the law implies a tacit admission of this difficulty and proposes to remedy it by paying higher salaries to minorities and women, as if race or gender were a special asset, such as the ability to teach mathematics or physics. If it succeeds, it cannot but embitter and discourage qualified white and oriental male applicants for those positions, as well as deprive qualified black, brown and red applicants of their just due. Even now there appears to be a fierce recruitment effort going on, with a bidding war no doubt soon to follow.

There is no doubt as to what our community colleges will become as a consequence of this emphasis on race and gender. We have before us the example of the University of California at Berkeley, touted as one of the finest institutions in the world, which has the most diverse student body of any four-year school in the nation. The social engineers appear to have won a complete triumph there, having achieved the startling percentages of 32 percent white, 28 percent oriental, 22 percent Hispanic, 22 percent black and almost three percent Native American, according to news reports. Of course, these omelet-like figures were not achieved without breaking a few uncooperative eggs. Many qualified white and oriental students had to be denied admission and large numbers of unqualified black, brown and red students had to be admitted to achieve these percentages. And the result has been the virtual "Balkanization" of the student body. The caucasians and orientals are considered obstacles to the progress of other students and the protected groups are widely suspected -- no doubt wrongly in more than a few cases -- of being students simply because of racial quotas. Not surprisingly, significant numbers of these groups reportedly keep pretty much to themselves and regard members of the other groups as

rivals hostile to their aspirations and goals.

Now while community colleges' student bodies have, with considerably less social engineering than the University of California, approached numbers reflective of the State's population, we now propose to do to our teaching staffs what Berkeley did to its student body. The seeds of future racial, ethnic and gender conflict are being sown at this very moment.

The truth is, there is no reason to diversify our faculties to correspond to our student bodies. There is no white, black, brown, red or yellow -- or male or female -- education. If we are really serious about maintaining -- and capitalizing on -- racial and ethnic diversity, we should encourage our society's long-standing commitment to equal rights to produce its ultimate result: a color-blind educational system which pays no attention to the color of a person's skin -- or the shape of his or her anatomy -- but only to the quality of that person's educational attainments. Let us take our thumbs off the scales of educational weighing and let our students pursue their educational goals, and our faculties their pedagogical and scholarly goals, unfettered by racial or sexual discrimination.

Why is AB1725 so committed to affirmative action as the handmaid of pluralism? The reason is simple: because its authors either misunderstand or reject the natural rights principles of equal rights and government by the consent of the governed. Wrongly they believe that justice for non-white and non-male human beings has occurred not <u>because</u> of our nation's original dedication to those principles but in <u>spite</u> of it. Incorrectly inferring that America's founders were racists because they did not abolish slavery, they leap to the additional invalid conclusion that white males cannot do

justice to non-whites and non-males without going to the extreme of discrimination in reverse. They believe that only by stressing the differences rather than the similarities of human beings can we ensure that equal justice (if indeed that is their goal) can be done. Their errors threaten to undo all the good that has been done, by discrediting human equality -- the only principle which can possibly bring about and make legitimate a multiracial and multiethnic society in which men and women, boys and girls, are "judged by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin."

III

The purpose of AB1725 has been alleged to be the reform of community college education and the promotion of racial and gender diversity. It may well do neither and may even retard both. The law's open-ended and formalistic reforms at best reaffirm the traditional community college goals, but they do not in any way challenge the moral and political relativism which undoubtedly led to the call for reforms. Genuine reform would entail thinking about the purposes of education and not merely critical thinking of a perfunctory sort on behalf of whatever goals educators propose. But neither at the State nor at the district level have we seen a rethinking of our purposes, for it is generally assumed that the purposes of education are beyond human understanding and meanwhile there is a popular social agenda being promoted by the academic left which stirs greater passions. Until that day comes when critical thinking goes beyond the elementary stage -- and it is unlikely to come very soon -- educational reform will continue to be more a dream than a reality.

Accompanied as they are by the most comprehensive affirmative action program ever attempted, the academic reforms of AB1725 face a quick

extinction from -- if they are not in fact subordinate to -- this cancerous form of social engineering. The establishment of numerical and percentage goals for the community colleges as a whole -- which the Chancellor's Office Analysis of the law calls "unprecedented" -- is precisely the wrong goal for education -- now or at any time. Education has essentially nothing to do with the accidents of birth, and we certainly will not overcome the effects of those accidents by according them the leading role in our colleges. Patronizing our black, brown and red -- and female -- students can only stigmatize them and alienate them from white, oriental and male students. This is not mere theorizing but is in fact the current situation at one of the nation's leading universities. Similarly, our faculties cannot be expected to work for common goals in education if race or gender are stressed more than knowledge or skill. No amount of legal or academic doubletalk can mask the fact that the pursuit of racial and gender goals as an overriding goal of community colleges must inevitably bring the sacrifice of academic excellence among students and faculty. We must return to the principle of our nation's founding -- the equality of human beings in their rights -- which alone can overcome unfair discrimination and is the ultimate cause of the racial and ethnic diversity in our political community.

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